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TELEGRAM

FROM

AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

CLASSIFICATION

E.O. 11652:
TAGS:
SUBJECT:GDS
PGOV PINT AR
President Videla's First Anniversary Address

ACTION:

SECSTATE WASHDC

INFO:

AMEMBASSY ASUNCION
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200600044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

☒ Release ☐ Excise ☐ Deny

Exemption(s):

Declassify: ☐ In Part ☒ In Full☐ Classify as ☐ Extend as ☐ Downgrade toDate ☐ Declassify on ☐ ReasonAMB
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[REDACTED] BUENOS AIRES 2494

REF: Buenos Aires 2336

1. SUMMARY. Videla's anniversary speech to nation contained no surprises. He justified the military coup, summed up progress of first year of efforts to bring order and stability to country, and inaugurated a "period of creation" during which Argentines will reform themselves, conduct dialogue on political and economic future, and prepare a proposal for national unity. Only when these steps are accomplished will nation be ready for establishment of new order and relinquishment of power by military. Substance and tone of delivery of speech were sober and philosophic, committing GOA to nothing concrete and setting no real schedule for movement.

Moderation appears to be the policy, however, and options for GOA

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and Argentina remain reasonably open. END SUMMARY.

2. General Videla addressed nation on radio and TV for 30 minutes on evening of March 31, reporting on his first year as President and suggesting course military plan to follow in short to medium term future. Videla's image as austere, reasonable man, without the harshness or stridency in public speaking tone of a Pinochet, left ~~poor~~ listeners with impression of firmness but nothing of the stereotypical Latin American military caudillo.

3. He began by justifying his Junta's coup of March 1976, reviewing the political and economic chaos of the period, and emphasizing that military had been forced to fill power vacuum left by failure of constitutional mechanisms to resolve ~~crises~~ ^{crises}. First and most important task was battle against subversion, but military victory over subversion was not only goal of military. Videla said "Permanent goal...is that of establishing a true, durable political order based on the values of freedom, equality, justice and security." While subversive action has been markedly reduced, it is still capable of random acts, and GOA will continue anti-subversive effort "...irrespective of the form it may adopt."

4. Moving to second priority effort of last year, Videla reviewed economic difficulties of coup period and subsequent partial recovery. He cited as basic the success in "...preventing unemployment and loss of international confidence." He recognized "stoicism" of poor during last year, and attitude of those who produced, invested and paid taxes. In only approach to harshness

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in speech, however, he castigated lack of social responsibility of some who "...despite their power of decision over goods and resources provided by the nation, ...are the ones who are not supporting the country and encouraging the possibility of great profits and hope that inflation will never end." Toughest line in speech was: "The armed forces will not tolerate those who, by enjoying their own life, do not honor the sacrifice of our heroes."

5. Videla drew Solomonic line by setting as economic goal "...a permanent compromise between the advantages of development and the equitable personal and regional distribution of the benefits of this development." Strong agricultural expansion must balance industrial growth, with private sector having responsibility for areas not vital to national security.

6. "Clear-cut goals" of military are "reorganization of economy, improved functioning of state, new development style, recovery of morality and confidence." Three stages in journey are period of reorganization now substantially complete, period of creation of ideas and consensus on new political and economic structures now beginning, and final period of national unity with implication of return to democratic civilian government. Key to second period is statement: "Formulation of proposal to country is fundamental task which armed forces will have to undertake in period of creation." This "...may lead to a civilian-military agreement." This proposal, however,

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does not "...imply the existence of an electoral schedule."

It will include initiation of a dialogue to allow widespread participation in development of ideas--"We are willing to listen, and listening presupposes dialogue."

7. To complete period of creation, military will have to accomplish: first, complete eradication of subversion; second, restructuring of relationship between individuals and community; third, modernization both in ideas and men, paving road for new leaders; fourth, development and implementation of legal instruments to revitalize political institutions of nation; fifth, modification of political practices and procedures for selection of leaders. Only on completion of these steps will institution of democratic regime reflecting joint desires of armed forces and representative civilian sectors be possible.

8. Videla ended by admitting possibility of unintentional mistakes and efforts in work carried on so far (generally interpreted as reference to human rights), and giving assurances that military not motivated by lust for power or desire to remain in power forever. They will stay, however, until their goals are recognized and guaranteed.

9. COMMENT. Press response has been favorable, with some cautious comment, but at this writing there have been few meaningful editorials or other response from politicians or public. Speech was not anticipated with bated breath, and not heard with alarm or even great interest, which may have been more

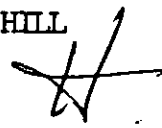
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or less what Videla intended. Comment which we offered in reftel on anniversary statement of Junta applies equally to Videla speech. Military have left themselves uncommitted to any precise timetable or to any clearly defined ideological path. Within guidelines laid down by Videla there is margin for almost anything, and goals are so broadly defined that they can be declared accomplished in any time period ranging from a year or two to several generations; "restructuring relationships" between Argentines will be an open-ended task at best. On balance, only clear conclusion to be drawn is that Videla and the moderates remain in control, committed to re-establishing in Argentine something resembling the sincere if shaky efforts at achievement of democracy of the past, and unwilling to contemplate taking Argentina off to the extremes of either the political and economic Right or Left.

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